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Sen. Bob Morton

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**Livestock damaged by  
state's wildlife deserves compensation**

The number of confirmed cougar and black bear complaints reported to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) by the public has nearly quadrupled since 1995. WDFW received 927 confirmed cougar complaints and 786 confirmed bear complaints in 1998. With the complaints come more human safety issues, property damage and pet and livestock killings.

A few years back, Len McIrvin, a Ferry County cattleman, contacted my office to tell me that he had lost 40 calves to cougars in just one year. His loss was estimated at approximately \$15,000, a whole year of tuition for his then-college-age son.

Len's ranch, Diamond M Ranch, has been in business since 1943 and has seen a severe variation in how the government has chosen to control cougar populations, from encouraging ranching in Washington by placing a \$100 bounty on cougars to taking the bounty off, and from allowing sport hunting of cougars to treating the cougar as an untouchable sacred animal.

Regardless of how the state or its population views cougars and other dangerous wildlife, wildlife management is a duty of the state, and that duty includes the protection of livestock from wildlife. Personal property includes livestock, which to many agriculture families throughout Washington equates to how they support their family.

When their livestock is damaged or destroyed by wildlife, their livelihood is jeopardized. The state does not need to be an additional adversity to all the natural adversities faced by the agriculture industry.

This session, I have introduced a bill that would establish a system to provide full-value compensation for livestock damaged by the state's wildlife. Under Senate Bill 5026, livestock includes horses, mules, donkeys, cattle, sheep, goats, swine and ratite.

After all, we as citizens are responsible for any damage we may inflict upon another's property. Why should the state be exempt from responsibility for such damage, especially when that damage impacts one's ability to put bread on the table for his or her family?

**-end-**

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